

# How to Teach and Reinforce High-Frequency "Heart Words"

Early literacy educators use systematic and memorable strategies to teach high-frequency words. We give these important words a special name - "Heart Words." While we systematically develop phonics skills and expect children to segment and blend words, we still recognize that the hallmark of a good reader is seen in the growing collection of words that are instantly known "by heart"—so the child can focus on reading fluency and comprehension.



Here is a summary of our "best teaching practices:"

- **Define the high-frequency words** that you want all children to learn. Have high expectations! Teach children to spell and write these words with efficient letter formation. Provide meaningful, multisensory practice: **writing teaches reading and reading informs writing**.
- **Begin with "I," "love," "you," "a," "the," "Mom," "Dad," "my," "cat," "dog."** Use the *L-O-V-E Spells Love* and *M-O-M Spells Mom* songs to internalize spelling patterns.
- Notice these new "heart words" on language charts and in Big Books. **Focus attention on these words by using colored tape or acetate.** Encourage children to find the new sight words in their "I Can Read" Anthologies and in their Read and Sing Books.
- Create opportunities for **repetition, repetition, repetition** until fluency is achieved.
- Use word stamps to **create a "stamp and read skinny book"** using high-frequency words in a repeated pattern. "I see a...," "This is the..."
- Sing, sign, and read *I Can Spell Cat* to **affirm positive attitudes about spelling.**
- **Manually fingerspell** the letters in classmates' names.
- **Fingerspell, sing, and sign** new "heart words."
- Send home the first two "heart words," "I" and "love," on a **memory necklace** after the children have learned them by heart.
- Post the high-frequency "heart words" on **your ABC Phonics Word Wall display.**
- **Give children an "I Can Spell" bookmark or dictionary of high-frequency words for their writing folders** and encourage them to make a star or heart by each new word that they can read, write, and spell. Teachers may also highlight in yellow the words each child has mastered. Send one copy home of the bookmark or dictionary of most important words for parents' information.
- **Challenge the early readers to set ambitious goals** for additional sight word recognition and track their progress. **Celebrate progress!** Differentiate word work.
- **Involve "parents as partners"** in reinforcing instant recognition and efficient handwriting of "heart words." Have a systematic plan for sending words home: We send home sets of 14 words increasing in difficulty on hearts **attached on a ring, first pink "heart words," then purple, yellow, and green.** Extend this to include Elephant and Piggie words or district word lists.
- Engage children in **"kid writing" and independent writing**—everyday—throughout the day. **Expect children to accurately spell new "heart words"** in their kid-writing notebook, book making, and message writing projects.
- Enthusiastically reinforce **"You can spell!" "Wow! How did you remember that word?" "You worked hard! What's the next set of heart words you get to learn?"**

